

Fourth Ward and the Siege of

Rives Taylor

The stalemate in the city's Fourth Ward and Allen Parkway Village appears to be reaching a conclusion of sorts in late 1990. On one front, the joint efforts of Cullen Center, Inc., and American General Investment Corporation in the Founders Park Venture have precipitated the beginnings of a community participation process in the formulation of plans for the neighborhood's 600-plus acres. The city, in general, seems to be waiting on the sidelines of this current process. Meanwhile numerous city agencies, when questioned, are being very circumspect in describing their past actions in the area because of a lawsuit pending against the Housing Authority of the City of Houston (HACH), brought by residents of Allen Parkway Village. The community groups of the area, divided in allegiance, patience, and means, continue to try through a number of efforts to preserve, or at least save a bit of, their neighborhood.

Ruling in April 1989 against the housing authority in an injunction sought in conjunction with the lawsuit, federal judge Kenneth M. Hoyt assumed an admonitory tone:

The evidence shows that the HACH commenced destruction of the APV [Allen Parkway Village] apartments in 1983. Ever since the HACH's application for the renovation was rejected by HUD, the HACH has ceased to actively repair and improve APV apartments. Indeed, its policy of no-renovation has admittedly contributed to the uninhabitability of over 90% of the available units. The HACH's 1984 formal application to demolish the APV apartments simply memorializes a de facto policy to raze the apartments. . . . As a matter of policy, funds should not be used to study and plan an activity which activity cannot be legally accomplished by those funds.

It is clear that the HACH has set out on a course of conduct that creates a hazardous, uninhabitable environment for the tenants at APV apartments. It is equally clear that the purpose of the Frost-Leland Amendment was to stop that course of conduct.¹

That legal action should be necessary to protect the complex underscores the disparity between the ideals and goals of the city housing authority and the aspirations of a dwindling number of African-American residents in Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward. The issue is a much larger one, however. While a number of city officials are outspoken in separating the fate of Allen Parkway Village from that of Fourth Ward, events in the last 15 years, and more specifically the last two, have shown that the area bounded by downtown, Taft Street, Buffalo Bayou, and the West Gray vicinity is in fact an area with a common future — a future of great importance to the entire city. These disparate neighborhoods are at the epicenter of a complex array of private and public forces vying to fashion a vision of Houston for the 1990s. Planning this valuable acreage has tested and will continue to test the new balance of power in the city following its years of economic upheaval. Whereas Houston was a closed field of endeavor for private capitalism, a new era of community-based participation and vision has swept across the country, compelling even Houston, along with its private sector, to face the prospect of forming and building community consensus.

Up to this time, as witnessed by HACH's attempts along Allen Parkway, the city as a larger entity has not seen fit to be part of that process. The private sector, as demonstrated in the recent efforts of American General Investment Corporation and Cullen Center, Inc., in the Founders Park

Venture, is making good-faith attempts at learning how to work with this reality. Nonetheless, the trust of the neighborhood residents in either the public bureaucracy or the profit-driven corporation is minimal.

The efforts of the past year on the part of the Founders Park Venture to acquire portions of Fourth Ward and all of Allen Parkway Village and create a master plan for a large mixed-use development there make this a propitious moment to reexamine the physical and political landscape of these neighborhoods. In August 1990 a community forum was held and a neighborhood steering group formed, both orchestrated by Gary Hack of Carr Lynch Hack and Sandell of Boston and Frank Kelly of Sikes Jennings Kelly & Brewer of Houston, both urban design planning and architecture firms. In the first section of this article, the efforts of city agencies to solve the neighborhood's problems are examined in a chronological form that identifies the various actors and their intended policies. The alternative approach, urban policy made by eliciting community participation in order to formulate a coordinated master planning process, is apparent in the private sector's nascent efforts, mentioned above. The second installment will examine this formulation of urban policy and the origins and viability of the various Fourth Ward and Allen Parkway Village community activist groups.

Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward continue to be the testing grounds for a number of urban principles. A joint public-private partnership, more common in this age of limited government monetary largesse and expertise, will have to develop an effective inner-city urban renewal program along with its design principles and logistical and economic guidelines.

The need for an effective and comprehensive city master plan, possibly including notions of land use controls or zoning, is nowhere more apparent than in Fourth Ward. With the listing in the National Register of Historic Places of both Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward, the efficacy of this designation in general is largely unrealized and essentially unrecognized by the city as a great urban potential. The demolition and sale of Allen Parkway Village and the slow disappearance of Fourth Ward neighborhoods, whether the result of malevolent intention or not, raise the question of the validity and wisdom of dispersing the disadvantaged and elderly from homogeneous communities to smaller settlements scattered throughout the wider city. The improvement of vital road and service infrastructure, key throughout the city, is essential in Fourth Ward. Its antiquated water and sewer systems have stifled most new growth and rehabilitation on any scale and have given the city cause to adopt an unstated policy of outright condemnation in the area. There are even allegations, forwarded by community activist Virgil Knox, that this area will become the site for a Metro station built in conjunction with a proposed bullet train terminal across Buffalo Bayou.²

In terms of the political landscape of the city of Houston in the next decade, no emerging facet of the current debate will have more far-reaching ramifications than the concept of community control of a neighborhood's development. The question is no longer simply what the power structure wants, but rather how and to what end the community, the city, and the private realm will reach agreement. This is a new power-sharing and community-oriented decision-making process. Most planners would emphasize that a triangular dialogue between private interests, community participants, and public policy makers has to exist in order for the community-based process to function. A combined effort, a combination of resources, is needed to manage the complex interaction of agency priorities, public priorities, and market realities. By all accounts, what is missing from this triad in Houston is a coherent public policy on the part of the city, from its mayor, its city council, its planning department, or its housing authority. Such a policy could establish a context and framework for communication between the community and the private developer; the staff of a city planning agency could assure the free flow of information and create a prototypical process of interaction. Lacking such a policy, the private developer has taken on the conflicting roles of both developer and broad urban policy maker. Further, the citizens cannot turn to the city as the arbitrator between their own and the private sector's interests.

In the light of HACH's actions at Allen Parkway Village and the various city agencies' work in Fourth Ward, there is little possibility that city representatives would be trusted in these neighborhoods in the first place.

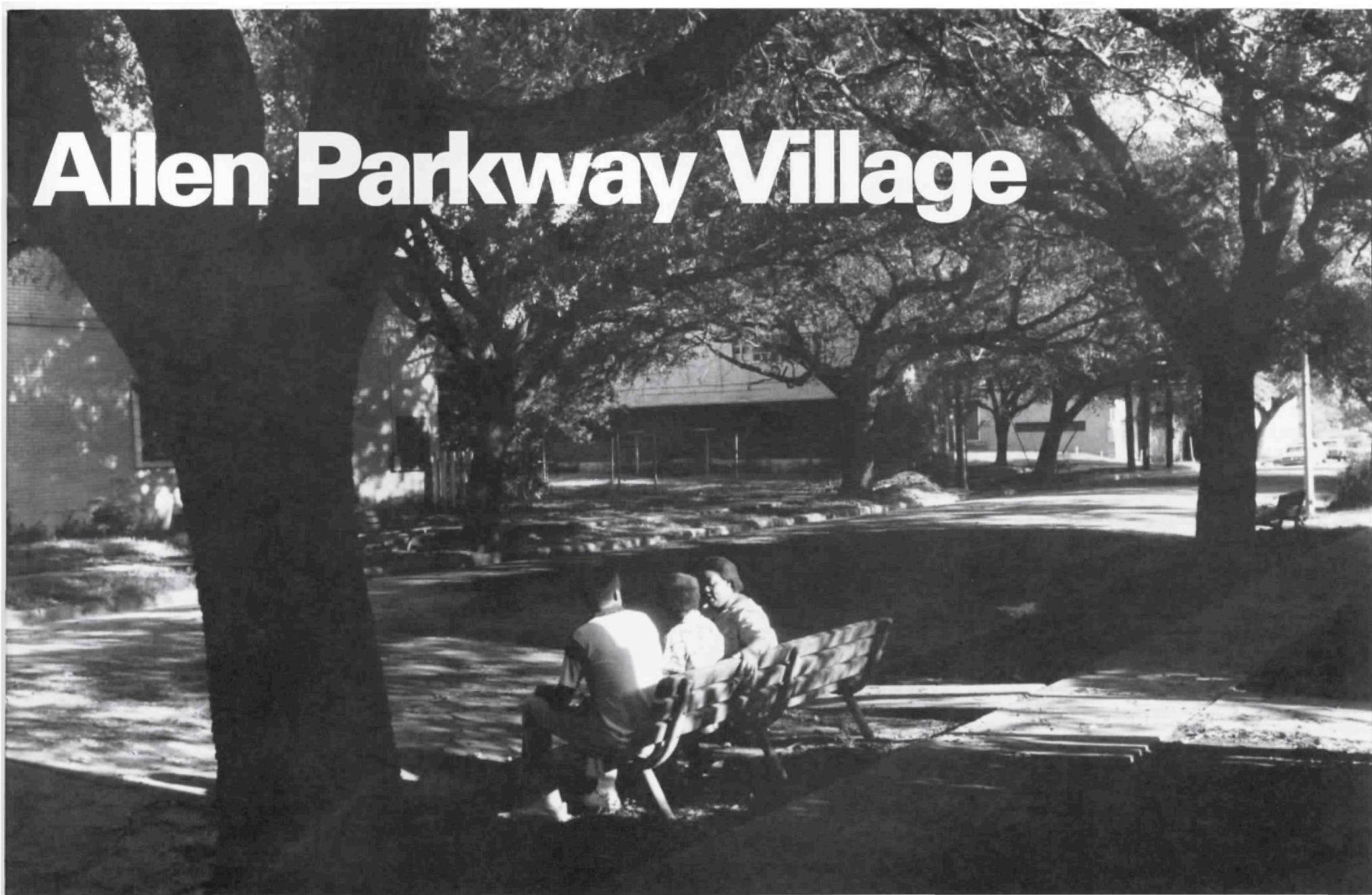
Notes

- 1 Kenneth M. Hoyt, 12 April 1989, United States District Court, Southern District of Texas, Houston Division, *Residents' Council of Allen Parkway Village et alia vs. United States Department of Housing and Urban Development et alia*, Civil Action H-89-0292.
- 2 David Theis, "Bad Connections," *Houston Press*, 30 August 1990, p. 12.



Aerial view looking west from downtown along the axis of West Dallas Avenue. Allen Parkway Village and Buffalo Bayou are to the right of West Dallas; Fourth Ward and the Freedmen's Town Historic District are to the left. The group of three towers, center top, is part of the American General Insurance Company complex, 1989.

Allen Parkway Village



View along Valentine Street in the center of Allen Parkway Village—San Felipe Courts Historic District, 1989.

AGENCIES AND ENTITIES

CITY

- Mayor and City Council
 - City of Houston Planning Commission
 - City of Houston Planning and Development Department
 - City of Houston Housing and Community Development Department
 - Building Conservation Division*
- Housing Authority of the City of Houston

STATE

- Texas Historical Commission

FEDERAL

- U.S. House of Representatives
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- U.S. General Accounting Office
- U.S. District Court, Southern District of Texas, Houston Division

PRIVATE SECTOR & INDIVIDUAL

- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Houston Housing Concern
- Allen Parkway Village Residents' Council
- Pro bono activists
- Developers
- Architects and planners

The Public Sector, Part 1:

What HACH Hath Wrought

The Housing Authority of the City of Houston is an independent authority created by state and local statutes. Funded primarily by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and to a lesser extent by grants from the city, the corporation of the housing authority is in budget and operation theoretically independent from the city.

However, the mayor of Houston appoints the five members of its board of commissioners. These are citizens from outside the public agency who have an interest in and commitment to housing problems. One of the five commissioners is appointed chairman by the mayor and approved by the other commissioners. Zinetta Burney, chair of the commission since 1984 and a lawyer, recently described the board's purpose as creating policy for what is "essentially a regulatory agency." While HACH manages a citywide network of units, Allen Parkway Village has become the most visible symbol of the authority's policies.

More than 20 percent of the housing authority's inventory of 4,443 units are in Allen Parkway Village.¹ The critical situation of the complex becomes evident when one consults housing authority statistics to find that, as of September 1990, the complex had 96 units "out of service" and 862 units designated "unleasable." Thus out of a total of 1,000 units, only 42 were leased and occupied. The vacancy factor of Allen Parkway Village, by a statistical sleight-of-hand, is therefore zero.

The position of director of the housing authority can be a turbulent one. HACH's current executive director, chosen by the housing authority board, is Joy Wardlaw Fitzgerald, who succeeded the flamboyant Earl Phillips as director in December 1989. Each was selected after a nationwide search. Phillips, reportedly well connected with

Reagan administration HUD officials, headed the authority from August 1982 until his resignation in early 1989. According to Burney, he "reversed the poor condition and status of HACH" that he inherited from William McClellan, who was director from 1979 to early 1982. McClellan, an appointee of Mayor Jim McConn, was fired from the position by the housing authority board at Mayor Kathy Whitmire's urging when she first took office; the board then resigned. Whether this was an admission of complicity in the running of a shamefully disorganized agency or a protest of the new mayor's strong-arm tactics is not known. Burney was one of Mayor Whitmire's new appointments to the board; she took office in 1982.

When interviewed, Burney refrained from discussing the pending lawsuit and HACH's current policy regarding Allen Parkway Village. She did restate the authority's overall philosophy, as articulated in an article written by Earl Phillips for the *Houston Post* in August 1987: "Our society no longer applauds the notion of warehousing the poor in sprawling mini-cities of public housing within larger cities, encouraging them to remain in low-income communities where few role models for change or upward mobility exist."² Burney reiterated that the children of disadvantaged families, "learning by experience, exposure, and education," need to be integrated into the larger community, in smaller complexes that are designed not to have the stigma of public housing. One such complex is the 100-unit Forest Green in northeast Houston, acquired by HACH in 1978. The success of public housing dispersal, Burney emphasized, belies arguments that HACH opponents put forward. Their arguments, she stated, put too much emphasis on proximity to downtown as the key to viable public housing. Accessible employment, ease of transportation, and a close-knit ethnic community, all essential for the group's continued well-being, can be features of public developments scattered throughout the city, according to Burney.

Divide and Conquer

Yet the voices of opposition allege that HACH is simply following an old strategy of divide and conquer. The late Congressman Mickey Leland, a Democrat from

Houston's 18th District, in another August 1987 *Post* article targeted Allen Parkway Village as an "example of the failure of the Reagan administration to develop housing options for the poor."³ Of course, one problem with demolishing the 1,000 Allen Parkway units is that the housing authority, with 13,000 applicants on its waiting list, must quickly build one-to-one replacements for all units that are disposed of.

Pursuant to HACH's policy of public housing dispersal, Allen Parkway Village has for the last 13 years been the target of three concerted but ill-conceived applications made to HUD by the Houston housing authority for permission to demolish the complex and sell its 37-acre site. As late as 1977, 95 percent of Allen Parkway Village was occupied, with thousands on the waiting list.⁴ Even at this date the complex had been "allowed to deteriorate," and "very little if any preventative [sic] maintenance had been done on the property over the last 10 to 15 years," said H. J. Tollett in 1985.⁵ Tollett, chairman of the HACH board of commissioners from 1982 to 1984, favored demolition and disposition of the Allen Parkway Village property, as had many commissioners over the years. It was under the directorship of Robert Moore (1976-78), during Fred Hofheinz's administration, that the housing authority in November 1977 forwarded the first of three "secret" requests to HUD to demolish Allen Parkway Village. In the proposal, demolition was the only course of action advocated by HACH, the authority having estimated that rehabilitation of Allen Parkway Village would cost \$11 million. This was "far too much" for what was currently available for such expenses, stated the HACH proposal. Also, Allen Parkway Village's property values had "escalated beyond a cost where housing is the highest and best use." The proposal valued the 37-acre site at between \$17 and \$26 million, and Moore mentioned that one or two developers were interested as well. What he did not mention was that an unnamed developer had met with the commissioners of HACH and strongly urged them to demolish the units and sell the land. This developer had left a \$1 million check to "show his good faith."⁶ The commissioners had kept the demolition request secret to avoid the "problem" of explaining their actions when they themselves did not have all the answers.⁷

* In Public Works Department until 1989.

The response from the Carter administration's secretary of housing and urban development, Patricia Roberts Harris, and HUD's regional director, Tom Armstrong, was negative. The alternative housing sites were in the far suburbs, and Harris apparently (according to Armstrong) had a policy against disposing of low-income housing if it could be rehabilitated. Armstrong related, "She was not going to let the developers profit at the expense of low-income people."⁸ HUD instead encouraged HACH to apply for federal funds to rehabilitate the complex, and in 1979 HUD made \$10 million available for that purpose. Sometime in that period HACH started to receive directed funding, in the neighborhood of \$1 million a year, for the maintenance of Allen Parkway Village. Moore stated some years later in retrospect that when the housing authority took the money it was with the idea that any sale of the complex was out of the question.⁹ The following year HACH went so far as to pay an architectural firm to estimate the cost of rehabilitation. The figure was \$11.6 million, or \$11,600 per unit.

Eleven years after HUD made its allocation, the bulk of the \$10 million remains untouched. By 1985, with 13,500 qualified applicants on the waiting list for public housing, only \$700,000 had been spent at Allen Parkway Village, none of it for rehabilitation. In fact some \$337,000 was spent on administrative expenses and \$40,000 in boarding up units.

Mayor Jim McConn in the late 1970s spearheaded the effort to dispose of the housing project and arranged a sale to Kenneth Schnitzer, who was developing the Allen Center complex on the other side of Interstate 45. The deal is reported to have gone as far as arrangement of financial terms before the real estate market cooled off.¹⁰

In Washington, the new Reagan administration and HUD secretary Samuel Pierce encouraged HACH to take a second look at the future of Allen Parkway Village. With

this impetus, a second "secret" demolition request was sent to HUD in late 1981, just after Mayor McConn was defeated by Kathy Whitmire. In the request HACH admitted that although Allen Parkway Village was "not in excess to [sic] local needs of low-income housing" (which would make it ineligible for demolition under HUD guidelines), HUD should waive this requirement. Further, the HACH request stated that current funds were not adequate to improve the complex significantly. This seems to be a mistake, given the \$10 million HUD allocation of 1979.

The request was warmly received in Washington nonetheless, so warmly that HUD not only allowed HACH to bypass the agency's area and regional offices (where holdovers from the Carter days might detect the same problems as before), but also overlooked the mounting evidence of HACH's own financial mismanagement, if not outright fiscal ineptness. Criticism from HUD auditors, who cited huge cost overruns, focused on unjustifiable travel expenses and large salaries paid to an excessive number of administrators. At the same time, citywide public housing management and maintenance had become a low priority. The 1980 HUD investigation simply stated that HACH "routinely violated federal fair-housing laws and [its] own guidelines."¹¹

However, in March 1982, two months into the new city administration and just before McClellan was fired, the Housing Authority of the City of Houston sent a finalized demolition proposal to HUD that included the confidential disclosure of an undisclosed party's offer of \$60 to \$70 million for the Allen Parkway Village property. This apparent boondoggle incited the regional HUD agents, who knew the land was worth much more (a confidential HACH appraisal of March 1982 pegged it at \$250 million),¹² to advise the new mayor that HACH's financial improprieties and mismanagement required the dismissal of McClellan and the board of commissioners. Mayor Whitmire took the advice.

Whitmire's Opportunities for Reappraisal

Her administration now had the opportunity to break with unsuccessful past policy. On 27 September 1982 the new director, Earl Phillips – hired in the previous month by the new board of commissioners at Mayor Whitmire's instigation – sent a letter to HUD requesting emergency appropriations from the \$10 million renovation fund. The request contained an estimate that HACH needed \$5.67 million to restore safe and sanitary conditions at Allen Parkway Village. Yet the letter is tagged with a peculiar reference to the complex's uncertain future: "Be advised that no final decision has been made by our Board relative to the selling or the complete rehabilitation of this development. However there is a need for immediate emergency repairs totalling \$5,676,300." Phillips continued, "We recognize that if we do not obligate these funds at this time that the remaining dollars would be returned to the HUD central office." The sum included utility repairs, architecture and engineering fees, and over \$2 million for roof repairs and building remodeling.¹³ The reference to the "remaining dollars" being returned apparently stems from a HUD policy freezing funds for a project if those funds were not used for rehabilitation: earlier in the year HUD threatened to freeze the remainder of the original 1979 appropriation.

In response to this rather indecisive letter, HUD on 27 January 1983 disapproved the request: "The majority of the items in your request were either for long-range improvements, or the items were of the scope that can currently be maintained in your Operating Budget."¹⁴ The latter budget was now \$1 million per year solely for the maintenance of Allen Parkway Village. HUD admonished HACH, stipulating that requests for such additional "maintenance" funds could be made only if the funding was beyond the financial limits of the HACH operating budget, if the funds were necessary to maintain the minimum number of habitable dwelling units required, or if the work was beyond the capability of HACH's maintenance staff to perform. The implied question was, Why spend in excess of \$5 million on the complex when Houston's housing authority was still considering tearing it down?

A 1982 HACH appraisal made in connection with the demolition request had pointed out to HACH the potential value of selling the property. Even with Houston's slowing economy, the housing complex acreage could potentially draw \$250 million; so stated a "confidential" housing study of March 1982. Assuming top-end assembling and construction costs of \$50,000 per residential unit, the authority could build approximately 5,000 new units with the windfall. These new units also could be scattered around the city to conform to HACH's antiwarehousing policy.

In order to smooth the way for demolition, in the ten years between 1976 and 1985 HACH began a program of changing the composition of the population of Allen Parkway Village that might organize to oppose it. That, in the eyes of certain HUD officials, appeared to be a planned attempt to foster internal antagonism, divisiveness, and interracial hostility within the complex. Inspection of tenant rolls shows a decrease in the percentage of black families from 66 percent in 1976 to 35 percent in 1985, with an increase of Indochinese

families from 5 percent in 1976 to 60 percent in 1983. Poor white elderly tenants, many longtime residents, all but disappeared, because apartments left vacant by a tenant's death were not filled.¹⁵ HACH denied this "steering," or skipping over eligible black families. Then in 1985 nearly 40 percent of the Indochinese families in Allen Parkway Village were evicted, in a scandal involving HACH staff practices of issuing invalid leases. As reported in both local papers, the tenants, who had no money for a legal challenge, chose to move out. The empty units were boarded up; whole blocks of Allen Parkway Village began to be abandoned.

It was at this juncture, 1980 to 1984, that the efforts of the Allen Parkway Village Residents' Council and its chairman, Lenwood E. Johnson, attained the credibility and authority to become known in the larger city community, beyond the project, Fourth Ward, and HACH.

By 1983 a number of factors pushed the authority to rethink a demolition proposal. The city had just hired Efraim Garcia as director of the Department of Planning and Development. His mandate was to plan the redevelopment of Fourth Ward and Allen Parkway Village; he later recounted that this modern urban renewal effort was "fairly cut and dried. . . the decision to demolish Allen Parkway Village had been made in advance."¹⁶ The theory of action was succinctly stated in a slogan adopted by the Allen Parkway Residents' Council: "As goes Allen Parkway Village, so goes Fourth Ward."

The majority of the HACH board of commissioners continued in 1983 to see the economic benefit of demolishing Allen Parkway Village and selling the land. To that end, Phillips hired a housing specialist from New York, Robert Aprea, in May 1983 to research the area and, among other things, ascertain the cost of rehabilitating the housing complex. After field research and meetings with a select steering committee, Aprea produced a figure of \$36,200 per unit, or a total of \$36.2 million. Aprea's study was probably the first comprehensive survey of the urban infrastructure and the demographic, architectural, and cultural components of the area. It took into account the need for a master plan to reflect existing conditions and resident aspirations,¹⁷ but what stood out was the enormous Allen Parkway Village figure. The figure's magnitude is even more apparent when it is compared to rehabilitation costs at two other HACH projects, Clayton Homes and Kelly Village, both of the same age and construction type as Allen Parkway Village. Their rehabilitation price tag was \$10,000 per unit, a range that HUD usually authorized. The sum to rehabilitate Allen Parkway Village was "far too large to justify it."¹⁸

\$36,200 Rehabilitation Price Tag

Following the publication of the \$36,200 figure, opponents to demolition claimed the cost was in fact inflated by 100 percent to 600 percent. Such items as \$385 doors, jogging trails, elevators for the three-story blocks, and paint jobs of \$1,400 per unit were pointed out as excessive. There was some question about whether Aprea had included interim construction interest and HUD financing costs, to a tune of \$3.5 million, to bolster the size of the renovation budget. These numbers were usually built into the standard HUD loan and not part of the actual "renovation request."



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Forty families remain in the 1,000-unit Allen Parkway housing complex, despite the city's repeated efforts to remove them. The neglected project represents 20 percent of the housing authority's inventory.



Individual garden plots in one of the many green spaces between apartment blocks at Allen Parkway Village, 1989.

Lenwood Johnson and the Allen Parkway Village Residents' Council, assisted by community activist Barry Klein, countered with a critique of Aprea's conclusions and their own "research" that showed the job could be done for \$14,500 per unit. They also pointed out that HACH itself had estimated that to buy the land and construct 1,000 replacement housing units anywhere in Houston the housing authority would have to spend close to \$50 million, more than the Allen Parkway Village renovation cost of \$36 million. A statement by Charles Taylor, former head of HACH's rehabilitation cost estimating section, in a court deposition in 1985 supported their accusations of cost inflation. Taylor testified that Phillips had indeed instructed him to "manufacture the hell out of them [the itemized costs]" to support Aprea's numbers. Taylor's staff had in fact established a figure for a "Cadillac design" at \$27,000 per unit. Taylor also related that Aprea had confronted him in the HACH offices with the admonition that Taylor's figures were too low to "justify demolition." Phillips denied all the inferences, and Aprea said the charges were the work of a disgruntled employee.¹⁹

By August 1984 Earl Phillips and the housing authority had processed the third and final demolition and disposition request.²⁰ The request went through several resubmissions. The first version of the submission of 1984 followed a November 1983 vote by the board of commissioners authorizing the executive director to seek HUD approval for demolition of the project. On 1 August 1984, city council and Mayor Whitmire finally went on record favoring demolition with a vote supporting the authority's request.

Public opinion, influenced by Lenwood Johnson's success at enlisting the aid of professionals outside Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward, had by 1984 begun to swing from apathy to a more critical stance. Editorials during June in both local papers called for a closer look.²¹ Dana Cuff, assistant professor of architecture at Rice University, put together a student design charrette in April 1984, which was followed by an issue of *Cite* devoted to Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward (Winter 1984). John Kaliski of the University of Houston, Diane Ghirardo of Texas A&M University, and other faculty members from area schools of architecture collaborated with Cuff on these efforts; the group solicited Aldo Rossi to participate as a juror in the charrette. In 1985 Cuff published a review of the events and the results of the design charrette in *Places*, a journal with a national design audience.²² In early 1986 *DiverseWorks* presented the multimedia exhibition *Architecture and Culture: The*

Fourth Ward, organized by Neil Prince and Deborah V. Brauer, which included another weekend design charrette, this time organized by the Young Architects Committee of the Houston chapter of the American Institute of Architects. A symposium followed featuring Renzo Piano. During the exhibition the KUHT-TV film *Who Killed Fourth Ward?*, produced in 1978 by James Blue, Ed Hugetz, and Brian Huberman, gained an even more appreciative audience. Architectural and cultural historians Kenneth A. Breisch, Nia Dorian Becnel, and Stephen Fox began the slow process of nominating Fourth Ward and then Allen Parkway Village to the National Register of Historic Places. A major point these pro bono efforts made was that the economic viability and cultural uniqueness of the neighborhood could be conserved with some modicum (as yet undefined) of public assistance.

There was renewed hope for groups favoring rehabilitation when the initial 1984 application for demolition of Allen Parkway Village and sale of its land was not approved. HUD had doubts and needed HACH to clarify two key points. While HUD noted that HACH focused mainly on the demolition and sale of the project, valued between \$98 million and \$114 million by HUD in December 1984, the HACH application did not tell how demolition would provide more efficient and effective housing. Nor did HACH outline how it would act to preserve lower-income housing within the larger city. Plans to repay development costs and existing debt were also vague. The second area of concern for HUD was that HUD "did not believe that the housing authority had sufficiently described and evaluated comments received from project tenants."²³

HACH responded with two more revisions, dated March and October 1985, that addressed these points. It is in these revisions that the authority established the housing goals and the time frame still in force today. The 1,000 replacement housing units would be distributed in smaller complexes around the city, with 400 housing units for the elderly to remain in Fourth Ward. The authority targeted 19,000 units of foreclosed property owned by the city that HACH might purchase for low-income housing. The applications also mentioned an indeterminate number of city-controlled properties available for new housing. These plans did not seem to include details of when, or how, the new units would be created. HACH also estimated that it would take three and a half years to relocate existing tenants, to demolish the structures at Allen Parkway Village, to develop a detailed request for proposals for disposition of the land, to

solicit, receive, and evaluate bids, and to negotiate a final agreement. The authority in fact only finally commenced the RFP process in the late spring of 1990.

In each of the two revisions HACH used the figure of \$120 million as the potential sale price. The General Accounting Office (GAO), in a 1986 report, estimated that \$6 million of this would be used to liquidate the indebtedness of the project (that is, the original funds loaned by the federal government to HACH in the 1940s to build Allen Parkway Village), relocate the tenants, and demolish the building. HUD estimated that the remaining \$114 million would allow for the construction of more than 2,000 units.

In January 1986 the HUD regional office in Fort Worth, which had given HACH such troubles in the early 1980s, at long last recommended that the national HUD office approve the request. Earl Phillips's connections with the Reagan administration and HUD officials finally seemed to be working.

Events in Washington

Yet there remained a gadfly. A few months earlier, in November 1985 and then again in January 1986, U.S. Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez, a Democrat from San Antonio, requested that the General Accounting Office study and review the HACH application on three points: did HACH meet the letter of the federal law for replacing demolished units; had the tenants been meaningfully consulted; and what was the basis for the \$36 million figure to rehabilitate the project? The GAO presented its findings in September 1986 in "The Report to the Chairman [on] the Proposed Sale of the Allen Parkway Village Project in Houston, Texas."

Congressman Gonzalez also issued in March 1986 the first of three requests to HUD to delay action on the demolition and sale of Allen Parkway Village. He had investigated the project's situation at the urging of Congressman Mickey Leland, who wrote in his August 1987 *Houston Post* article about the sad state of affairs at HACH. Gonzalez first requested a delay in order to allow time for the House Subcommittee on Housing and Community Development, which he chaired, to receive the GAO's report on the proposed sale. He next requested a delay when the GAO released the report, so his subcommittee could hold hearings on the audit. The final request, at the end of the year, asked for a delay until February 1987, because of the need to investigate another recent government audit of the application. Gonzalez continued to question whether the full letter of the law in demolition procedures had been followed. His concern was "the

implications for future demolition and disposition of public housing units in the nation."²⁴ HACH's response to the press was that this was one more delay in the inevitable process, and that the GAO's report had vindicated its action.

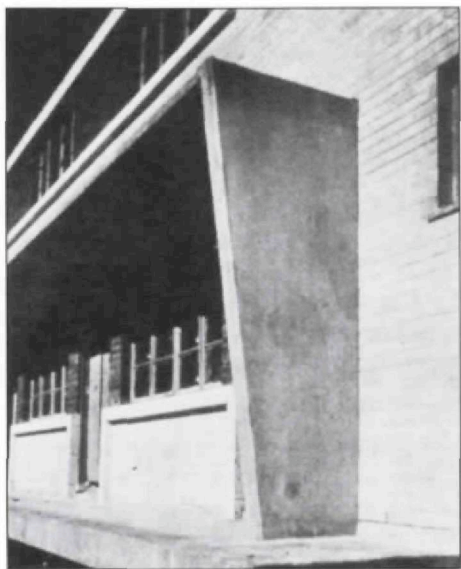
In brief, the 1986 GAO report found that the November 1985 revision met the letter of the law, as prescribed in Section 18 of the U.S. Housing Act of 1937. The five criteria were that the plans provide more efficient and effective housing; that lower income housing stock be preserved; that HUD be reimbursed for existing project debt and development costs be covered; that the redevelopment plan outline how tenants would be assisted in relocation; and that the city of Houston certify that the latest application conform to the city's housing assistance plan. With regard to consultation with tenants, the GAO found that notification and setting aside a period for comments had in fact taken place on a number of occasions throughout 1983 and 1984. The authority had also on numerous occasions made clear its intention to sell the complex. The third contested point that the GAO report addressed was the housing authority's \$36 million rehabilitation figure. Although it differed greatly from HUD's 1984 estimate of \$14 million, the figure was not an issue, "since a rehabilitation estimate is not required under law or HUD regulations as the basis for approving or disapproving the housing agency's disposition application."

Even with this vindication HACH did not get final approval from the national office of HUD. Gonzalez and Leland in effect stalled the decision through the early part of 1988 by asking for further studies and clarifications. The tactic caused the now infamous HUD secretary, Samuel Pierce, to send a scolding note to Gonzalez insinuating that Allen Parkway Village's dangerous condition was in large part due to the congressman's delays.²⁵ During this 1987-88 period articles in the guest editor pages in the *Post* and *Chronicle* attempted to sway public opinion. Presidential candidate Jesse Jackson toured Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward in March 1988 and compared the city's policy in the neighborhood with the policies of South Africa. Jackson also pressed HUD secretary Pierce to oppose demolition. At the same time, Congressman Leland disclosed Mayor Whitmire's proposal to spend \$25 million in community development funds for a convention center hotel while the city still lacked a credible plan and funding for the rehabilitation of Allen Parkway Village.

It was during February 1988 that the Allen Parkway Village Residents' Council, with the help of Nia Becnel and Stephen Fox, was successful in having the complex listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

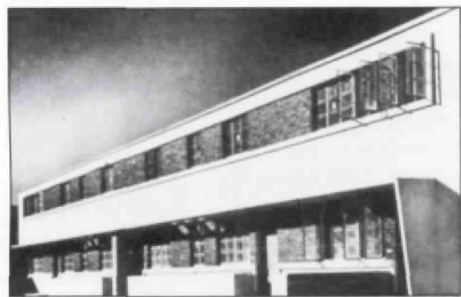
Legal Roadblocks

In the presidential election year of 1988, which led to a change of administrations and the eventual removal of Samuel Pierce and his cronies, a sea change took place in the fortunes of Allen Parkway Village. In mid-1988 an amendment to the Independent Agencies Appropriation Act of 1988, the Frost-Leland Amendment, was passed, prohibiting the expenditure of federal funds in any step on the path toward destruction. With this new directive, HUD became increasingly hesitant to act on HACH's unclear and ever-changing intentions. After all, the housing authority by 1988 had not found a prospective buyer for the Allen Parkway Village land, valued by



Detail of cast-in-place concrete canopy shielding first-floor window, Allen Parkway Village, 1942. The designing architects, MacKie & Kamrath, ingeniously combined ordinary building materials to give the apartment blocks much richer surface finishes than were customary for U.S.H.A.-built public housing complexes.

Architectural Record, April 1942



An apartment block at Allen Parkway Village, 1942. Associated Housing Architects of Houston, architects.

Architectural Record, April 1942

the residents' council's lawyers at only \$28.2 million; nor did Earl Phillips have much time to spare, as he was having a good deal of trouble in other quarters of his personal and professional life. (One thorn in his side was Memorial Plaza, a HUD-funded project to turn a defunct Holiday Inn, across Buffalo Bayou from Allen Parkway Village, into a complex to house elderly tenants.)²⁶ By May 1989 not only did HUD's director of public housing, under new secretary of housing and urban development Jack Kemp, want to know what HACH's long-term plans were, but there were hints that HUD wanted to see Allen Parkway Village rehabilitated. Eventually HUD would release the remaining \$9 million, funds originally forwarded to Houston in 1979 and then withdrawn in the wake of the 1984 HACH demolition request. In 1989 HUD began six months of repeated inquiries to the new acting director of HACH, Joy Fitzgerald, and her legal counsel about long-term plans. In a June 1989 letter Fitzgerald claimed that the housing authority had no clearly defined position for or against demolition and disposition.²⁷

By December 1989 HUD opposed anything but rehabilitation of Allen Parkway Village. The 1984 request for demolition was finally denied. The letter from HUD's director of public housing, Thomas Sherman, stated firmly that HACH had to submit a plan within 45 days "outlining its future intent for the project."²⁸

The year 1989 saw a flurry of legal and political activity as the tide turned against demolition. In conjunction with its lawsuit against HACH, the Allen Parkway Village Residents' Council in January obtained a restraining order against HUD and HACH prohibiting use of federal funds to pursue demolition. Federal judge Kenneth M. Hoyt based his decision on the Frost-Leland Amendment and barred the housing authority from spending federal monies in any way to further the cause of demolition; the order is still in force. Led by Rodney Ellis and Anthony Hall, city council rescinded its support for demolition four and a half years after it was approved. This occurred after years of protest marches on council chambers by the residents' council and activists of the Houston Housing Concern.

From mid-March through mid-April 1989 Judge Hoyt heard testimony from the residents' council against HUD and HACH in the injunction hearings. Dating from February 1987, the lawsuit is an attempt by the residents of Allen Parkway Village to make HACH abide by the restrictions of the Frost-Leland Amendment (HUD Regulations Section 415) and use the \$9.3 million already appropriated by HUD and the \$1 million annual maintenance fund for the legally mandated maintenance and rehabilitation of Allen Parkway Village. After the first hearing, the residents' council withdrew its request for an injunction against HUD, as it was apparent that HUD was no longer pushing for demolition or withholding funds for rehabilitation.

In the midst of the lawsuit and the resignation of Earl Phillips in mid-1989, HACH moved ahead with its request for proposals for the disposition and reuse of the Allen Parkway Village property. A request for proposals (RFP) in general is a document submitted by a developer team stating the team's ideas for development and the way it proposes to accomplish them. In this case

the RFP had to outline the developers' plans to replace low-income housing and relocate the tenants as well as state what the payment schedule to HACH would be. The request asked for a rough outline of public and private funding sources and schedules that would be used to pay for the development. In late April 1990 the authority released its first RFP; after almost ten years of applications, this seems to have been HACH's first attempt to follow the prescribed process and advertise for developer proposals. Either the authority had never before gotten that far, or it previously had decided to circumvent the process. In order to pay for the processing and administrative costs of the RFP while abiding by the court order not to spend any federal funding or any of HACH's own funds, this first RFP required a \$10,000 fee from all proposers before releasing project specifications.

The HACH board of commissioners met with little interest in the development community and declared that the few responses – including one from the Founders Park Venture group – were not in compliance. Later, in August, a second RFP was released, with a 9 November 1990 deadline; a \$10,000 fee was required to submit proposals. Apparently no complete proposals were submitted at all. In both RFPs the HACH board of commissioners linked the sale of the Allen Parkway Village property to a requirement that the developer himself build 150 low-income public housing units on site and 850 units elsewhere, a number that developers view as prohibitive.²⁹ The public agency seemed to have failed to understand what a profit-driven developer can accomplish.

As of fall 1990, the lawsuit against HACH is still pending. The residents' council remains hampered by lack of funds and, as Lenwood Johnson relates, less-than-enthusiastic pursuit of the case by its pro bono legal counsel. Prehearing motions continue before the trial date, originally set for 30 July, then pushed back to 30 September, and then pushed back again to the end of October; at publication no date had been announced. There has been a good bit of negotiating between the parties, although public officials remain elusive about any aspect of the court case. A late September 1989 memo to the mayor suggests that HACH expected at least 120 units in Allen Parkway Village to be rehabilitated and brought up to HUD standards, bowing to community activists. A point in this review to the mayor promises that the housing authority will "review successful plans in other U.S. cities."³⁰ This is encouraging from an organization whose myopic policies, the unfortunate result of internal disarray, have wasted 15 years and millions of public dollars. Today the majority of Allen Parkway Village's 1,000 units – which at one time provided decent housing – remain boarded up, the culmination of a decade of neglect during which Houston's need for public housing has only grown.

Editor's note: Mickey Leland's successor, Craig Washington, was reported in mid-November to be considering trying to repeal the Frost-Leland Amendment.³¹

Notes

- 1 This figure included 3,733 "conventional" units, public housing for low-income tenants and the elderly, and 300 Section 8 units, subsidized but privately owned apartments.
- 2 "Allen Parkway Problem: It simply outlived its usefulness," *Houston Post*, 23 August 1987.
- 3 *Houston Post*, 19 August 1987, p. 3B.
- 4 The chronology of Allen Parkway Village from the late 1970s through 1985 was gathered in a series of articles by Craig Flournoy, "The Houston Project," in the *Dallas Morning News*, 9 June 1985, pp. 1A, 28-30A, 10 June 1985, pp. 1A, 6A, 7A. The dates are corroborated by a United States General Accounting Office document of 1986, "Proposed Sale of the Allen Parkway Village Project."
- 5 Flournoy, "The Houston Project."
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Ibid.*; quoting Frumencio Reyes, "We anticipated more problems bringing that out publicly than answers we had at the time."
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Regelio R. Santos for James Wilson, Supervisor 6.87, to Phillips, 27 January 1983.
- 15 Flournoy, "The Houston Project."
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 Economic Research Associates had prepared a working paper, "Phase A: Reconnaissance," in October 1979 that was an economic and quasi-social overview of Fourth Ward in the context of rapidly growing Houston. This document chronicled the existing infrastructure, housing, and public facilities, and discussed the social cohesiveness of the neighborhood and its "private-sector participation potential." Skidmore, Owings & Merrill assisted in preparing the report.
- 18 Flournoy, "The Houston Project."
- 19 *Ibid.* Another interview "scoop" in Craig Flournoy's *Dallas Morning News* series; what should have caused sensation and scandal in Houston did not because local news media gave it scarcely any press.
- 20 In Flournoy's timetable this date is March 1984, while the GAO's 1986 report on the "Proposed Sale of the Allen Parkway Village Project" says August 1984. The date difference is key, as the GAO's date would have the HACH submission after city council's pro-demolition vote. The dates and submissions of HACH's efforts for the years of 1983 and 1986 come from this GAO report.
- 21 "A Question of Timing," *Houston Post*, 7 June 1984; "Need some clear answers on Allen Parkway plans," *Houston Chronicle*, 5 June 1984, sec. 1, p. 12; Bob Sablatura, "Allen Parkway Village should be renovated," *ibid.*, 29 June 1984, sec. 1, p. 27; see also "Housing Authority should explain itself. Forthwith," *ibid.*, 7 August 1984, sec. 1, p. 14.
- 22 "Beyond the Last Resort: The Case of Public Housing in Houston," *Places*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1985), pp. 28-43.
- 23 "Proposed Sale," GAO report, 1986.
- 24 Katherine Kerr, "Delay Sought," *Houston Post*, 11 December 1986.
- 25 Kathy Kiely, "Allen Parkway Village May Dodge Demolition," *Houston Post*, 25 February 1988, p. 12A.
- 26 See Tim Fleck, "House of Cards," *Houston Press*, 14 June 1990, pp. 6-14.
- 27 Fitzgerald's letter of 15 June 1989 is cited in Thomas Sherman, HUD Director of Public Housing, to Fitzgerald, undated (received December 1989).
- 28 Sherman to Fitzgerald, *ibid.*
- 29 James Robinson, "Private sector turns back on housing project," *Houston Chronicle*, 10 November 1990, p. 31A.
- 30 Joy W. Fitzgerald, 16 October 1990, "Allen Parkway Village Status Report to Kathryn J. Whitmire, Mayor, and City Councilmembers."
- 31 Robinson, "Private Sector." Robinson notes that repeal "would not necessarily guarantee that the government would approve the demolition."

The Public Sector, Part 2:

The Planning Department and Fourth Ward

In very much the same manner as Earl Phillips, Efraim García's power of personality, experience, and ties to the HUD hierarchy in Washington, D.C., made him appear well suited for the job of what one observer described as "packaging the Fourth Ward for sale to private interests."¹ He was known as a specialist in urban design block grants from his previous tenure as manager for planning in the San Antonio redevelopment agency. He had established his own consulting firm in San Antonio when in late 1982 one of Mayor Whitmire's assistants asked him to become director of the newly reorganized planning department, a post that included overseeing creation of the city's (as opposed to the housing authority's) housing policy. García saw his actions as director as justified by the notion that "we have the responsibility to be the leveraging mechanism."² To that end, García from the very beginning of his tenure in March 1983 worked to assemble and sell large tracts of Fourth Ward to a single developer in order to promote García's phrase, "orderly development."³ He also saw the fates of Fourth Ward and Allen Parkway Village as inextricably linked, a belief he shared with the residents of both places.

Much has been written about the cultural and architectural heritage of Fourth Ward's Freedmen's Town Historic District and the rapid disappearance of the fabric of the area. Technically, neither "Fourth Ward" nor "Freedmantown" (the original name of the settlement) describes a legally distinct area of the city; the appellations simply refer to an African-American community and its strong historical and spiritual presence. A number of resident and preservation groups have for years actively tried to save the area. The 40 blocks of the Freedmen's Town Historic District, within the larger 70-block Fourth Ward area, is an outgrowth of the original neighborhood that was founded in 1865 by freed black men and women. In 1985 the area was listed in the National Register of Historic Places, a designation that, although not officially recognized by any city agency, has found its way into the thinking of some developers and even into García's plans.

The more recent history of Fourth Ward is as lively as its beginnings, yet from the 1930s the neighborhood has been declining. Four interwoven political forces and social factors have shaped the character of the ward. During the 1920s and the Depression a number of families from Sicily who had settled in the area at the turn of the century began to buy land inexpensively from the original families, who were now destitute. As a result, the African-American landowner who lives in the area is scarce; more than 80 percent of the land is privately owned by absentee families or family-owned companies that hold five or more properties. Thus by 1984, 95 percent of Fourth Ward residents were renters, and poor.⁴ The absentee landlords, to their credit, have attempted to hang on, yet any sale of their land for a good price still makes economic sense to them.

The second reality to shape the ward is the migration of the population out of the neighborhood. African-American families who could afford to leave began to move away as early as the 1920s. The demolition of the most blighted part of the ward for the construction of the all-white housing project (as it was categorized at the time of

construction in both housing authority press releases and architecture periodicals) of San Felipe Courts, now Allen Parkway Village, occurred in 1940. The 1950 census showed 9,000 residents in Fourth Ward. By 1980 that figure had dipped to 7,000, a decrease of 8 percent from 1970; the city's population expanded 29 percent during the 1970s. The median income was \$4,755. Fifty-six percent of the population lived in what the city still defines as overcrowded conditions.⁵

Meanwhile, a number of churches remained in the neighborhood, the third significant force in the community. Their pastors, joining with precinct judges and the homeowners most often involved with Freedmen's Town rehabilitation projects, strengthened their political stewardship of the ward. These groups, however, have not been unified in their aspirations and goals.

City Policy of Condemnation

The fourth factor is the city of Houston's policies toward the area. Mayor Whitmire hired Efraim García expressly to handle the redevelopment of the area through the city's planning and development department. His efforts were hampered by the lack of a comprehensive city plan for the future. Also, García and Phillips quickly began to contend for superiority in their efforts to redevelop the larger area, a competition that led to mistrust and miscues.

After 1985 the city needed to face the issue of whether to recognize or ignore the designation of Freedmen's Town, and later Allen Parkway Village, as a National Register historic district, but instead it has avoided the question. In 1990, however, city council designated the Main Street-Market Square National Register historic district in downtown Houston a local historic district, the first municipal recognition of any special district other than scenic districts, where billboard size and location are restricted. Whether this will set a precedent for other National Register historic districts in Houston is not clear. Whether the city's seeming neglect is willful or due to a tight planning budget is debatable.

By 1984 the city's water, sewer, and public works agencies had announced that the infrastructure of Fourth Ward was in hopeless condition. New construction was banned until the city, or some other group, upgraded that infrastructure. Meanwhile the city's building code enforcement arm, the building conservation division, has been zealously enforcing a set of new building ordinances. These were adopted by city council in 1982 to set minimum standards of health and safety in new construction on a citywide scale with citywide application: setback, off-street parking, and right-of-way requirements are uniformly applied across the city, regardless of the character of the individual area. Fourth Ward's narrow streets with 19th-century dimensions, its dense accumulation of wooden houses, and its subdivided lots make the area an easy target for code violations and subsequent condemnation. Planning commission chairman Burdette Keeland points out that here again, with "the city running on zero budget, it's difficult to give any extra effort to solving individual human needs - it won't happen until someone is paid to look at it." Keeland continues that "any neglected area is due to the lack of a comprehensive plan



Looking north on Wilson Street in Freedmen's Town Historic District in Fourth Ward, 1984. These houses have since been demolished.



A shotgun cottage in Fourth Ward.

for the city. . . . Without directional guidance in a drawn form, every area in the city can fall into this dilemma." In a more conspiratorial vein, a report reached Lenwood Johnson in late September that a special city inspector from the building conservation division may recently have been assigned solely to Fourth Ward.

In the Winter 1986 issue of *Cite*, Douglas Sprunt reported an example of how such condemnation can affect historic structures. The historic Smith House was cited for code violations. Rather than face stiff penalties or be assessed the cost of demolition by the city, the owners chose to demolish the house. Issuing such citations to landowners almost inevitably brings buildings down. Had the city in fact proceeded with the demolition, it would have had to obtain environmental clearance from the Texas Historical Commission, since the Smith House was listed as a contributory structure within the Freedmen's Town Historic District. Other examples of heightened enforcement include the requirement of an unusually thick foundation slab for a two-story addition to Mount Horab Missionary Baptist Church, and the requirement of often onerous fireproofing work in small business establishments whose owners can ill afford it.

Absentee landlords are also quick to demolish if code violations are found. Research by the Houston Housing Concern (HHC), presented in an open letter to Mayor Whitmire of 21 January 1990, first documented the unusually high number of demolitions in the ward. This group saw the demolitions as a result of a consistent effort on the part of the city in the last five years to force land-use change by making it easier for developers to gobble up residential territory. "Few tenants want to wait for eviction because of code violations, [which results in] an atmosphere of dead ends, . . . so the house is abandoned," says the HHC letter. Landlords faced with a long list of expensive repairs also have no choice but to demolish the house - "a sensible policy on the owner's part if they are convinced that

tenants can't afford higher rents to cover improvements," concludes the HHC.

This downward spiral plays into the city's development plans, Houston Housing Concern alleges. The policies discourage reinvestment in existing properties, so even more properties are threatened with demolition for code violations, and even more landlords demolish their buildings themselves rather than face legal proceedings. In addition, the talk of city redevelopment and García's efforts at a package deal in 1983 led absentee landlords to suspend repairs on rental property in anticipation of being "bought out" by the city or a developer.

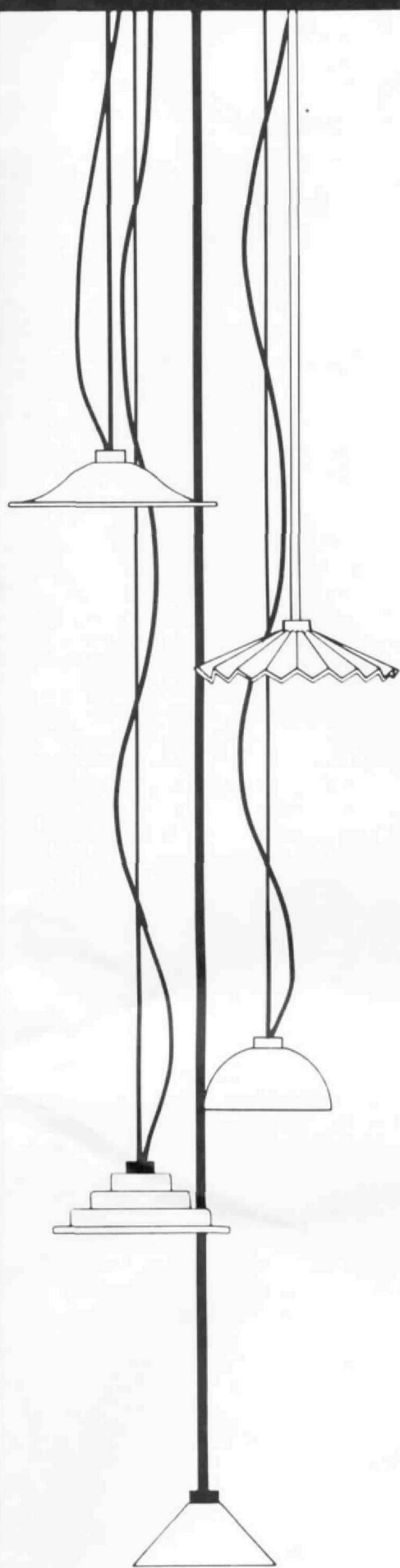
A question inherent in the Allen Parkway Village Residents' Council's lawsuit against HACH is used to conclude the Houston Housing Concern's letter. The query remains unanswered - are federal block grant monies being used to pursue Fourth Ward demolition?

García Enters the Fray

Efraim García entered the arena in 1983 and almost immediately embarked on the two projects that would be his hallmarks, El Mercado del Sol and the Fourth Ward redevelopment effort. He reorganized the planning department to concentrate power. To supplement the department's original task of platting he added a community development section and a long-range and comprehensive planning section. He also established 25 community development commissions, whose elected representatives on citizens' advisory committees have with varying degrees of success been responsible for allocating the \$25 million a year coming to the city from federal Community Development Block Grant funds.

By November 1983 García had created a plan to redevelop the 296 acres of Fourth Ward, a plan characterized by Jacqueline Bechman in *Houston City Magazine* as "reminiscent of the urban renewal projects used during the 1960s and 1970s to 'eliminate blight.'"⁶ This was a plan of (continued on page 31)

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Fourth Ward

(continued from page 11)

public and private sector partnership. García appealed directly to the Property Owners Association, which he had been instrumental in organizing. Under his direction the owners were to amass their properties, a total of 80 to 90 acres, with two city-owned tracts of land – the 37 acres of Allen Parkway Village and 13 adjacent acres – in order to make a large, attractive parcel for sale to a single developer. García aimed to sell Allen Parkway Village for \$46 per square foot, a total of \$100 million, and the private lands for \$15 to \$20 per square foot. García saw that it was essential that Allen Parkway Village be part of the Fourth Ward deal. The assembly would have to be successful in order to avoid the random sales that would frustrate a total effort; any “chance for a comprehensive redevelopment of the area would be lost” otherwise, said García.⁷

A mechanism was created, the Metropolitan Development and Real Estate Association, to orchestrate the Fourth Ward land sale. This “independent” association was a quasi corporation that could both purchase and amass land currently held as rental properties. It could also act as agent for the Sicilian absentee landlords in the negotiations with potential block buyers. By 1986 this association had grown to 225 landowners, mainly the white absentee landlords who controlled in excess of 80 percent of the area.

These 1983 plans called for a multi-use development and a new utility infrastructure and street grid, to be paid for by a federal grant for which the city of Houston would apply. The planning director also foresaw the need for the city to allocate funds to defray development costs and the costs of relocating existing low-income residents, most of them African-American tenants. Even before the state and federal historic district designations became official, García envisioned a token six-block historic district for Freedmen's Town. Founders Park and the adjoining Beth Israel Cemetery would remain as open space. This plan also would accommodate the 200 to 300 subsidized units for elderly renters from Allen Parkway Village that the developer of Fourth Ward would be obligated to build in the area. This was the same number of units that HACH had stipulated any developer would have to build in order to demolish and dispose of Allen Parkway Village.

García's Mistakes

What Efraím García did not anticipate, as Burdette Keeland relates, was the vast number of actors involved who needed to be satisfied. His first mistake was to appeal primarily to the absentee landlords, excluding the 20 powerful neighborhood churches, 104 resident homeowners, and owners of the scattered African-American businesses left in the ward. All of these groups had, in Keeland's words, “staying power and the commitment to the neighborhood.”

He also did not anticipate that the overlap of authority between him and Earl Phillips would lead to a power play. Both city agencies had “viable” plans for the Allen Parkway Village site, and each recognized the land as the linchpin to its own success. The two directors' goals were not incompatible: García wanted the essential Allen Parkway Village parcel linked with the Fourth Ward sites, and Phillips wanted the millions a sale would bring to pump back into HACH projects elsewhere. But neither strong-willed leader wanted to take a back seat to the other. Phillips was determined to ensure that, whatever happened on the Allen Parkway Village site, the resulting condition would not repeat the indignity that Fourth Ward had suffered in the early 1940s, when HACH displaced African-Americans to build the originally all-white San Felipe Courts.

When hostility boiled over in midwinter 1983-84, Mayor Whitmire stepped in to referee, giving García authority over Fourth

Ward and Phillips authority over Allen Parkway Village. She appointed R. Alan Rudy to act as mediator. (Jacqueline Bechman's *Houston City Magazine* article also names Rudy, one of the mayor's longtime advisers, as the man behind the redevelopment plan in the first place.)

García also overlooked the strength of outside support for the Fourth Ward community. During the 1983-84 period, the Allen Parkway Village Residents' Council, as García would relate, had elicited support from “vocal blacks and do-gooder whites.” Having stated that “historic preservation is a rich man's hobby,” he ignored both the funding that owners of historically designated properties can receive and the solidarity that a cause can bring. It quickly became apparent that, with the exception of the absentee Property Owners' Association, few of the neighborhood's residents or owners needed Efraím García to broker a better future for them.

By 1985, Houston's real estate market had become too soft to absorb 140 acres, and the timing was wrong to capture \$200 per square foot for the Allen Parkway Village parcels. Plans had to be put on hold as HACH tried to get permission to demolish and sell Allen Parkway Village. The deal fell apart completely in late 1986 when HUD rejected HACH's latest application for demolition, and the subsequent residents' council restraining order and lawsuit halted the process altogether. In mid-1987 Efraím García was asked by the mayor to resign as director of the department of planning and development.

During the 1988 and 1989 fiscal years an increasing number of grants were procured from HUD to rehabilitate groups of buildings in Fourth Ward. The Greater Houston Preservation Alliance early in 1989 was awarded a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation to help implement a “Freedmen's Town Community Credit Union Preservation Fund,” which was to be used to rehabilitate substandard houses for low-income residents.⁸ Throughout the last two years the Texas Historical Commission has been sending inquiries to the city about the demolition of listed buildings in the Freedmen's Town Historic District. It seems that a state agency has to step in to protect the historic elements of Houston.

In May 1989 the Metropolitan Development and Real Estate Association went bankrupt. At the end it had amassed 70 rental properties, covering 12 of the 115 privately owned acres in the neighborhood.

As was the case with Earl Phillips, Efraím García's golden touch and connections to the Washington piggy bank were not sufficient to overcome local obstacles. The successes of the urban renewal programs of the 1950s and 1960s, when federal money supported grand visions often designed by out-of-town designers and economists and implemented over the objections of the local residents, were not to be repeated here in Houston. It has fallen to the private realm (as usual in Houston) to create and implement the policy necessary for a feasible development – one linked, it is to be hoped, to a careful rehabilitation of Allen Parkway Village and Fourth Ward. ■

Notes

- 1 Flournoy, “The Houston Story.”
- 2 Quoted in James Peters, “Houston Gets Religion,” *Planning*, August 1985, p. 7.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 These dates and figures are taken from Jacqueline Bechman, “Fourth Ward – A \$100 Million Ghetto,” *Houston City Magazine*, May 1984.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Peters, “Houston Get Religion.”
- 8 *Preservation News*, June 1989, p. 1, 6.

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